

occupies so large a place in the minds of the people as
Worship of
Nyakang, the traditional founder of the dynasty and the
Nyakang>
ancestor of all the kings who have reigned after him to
the of the
present day. Of these kings the Shilluks have
preserved
the memory and the genealogy ; twenty-six seem to
have
sat on the throne since Nyakang, but the period of
time
covered by their reigns is much shorter than it would
have
been under conditions such as now prevail in Europe ;
for
down to the time when their country came under
British
rule it was the regular custom of the Shilluks to put
their
kings to death as soon as they showed serious
symptoms of
bodily or mental decay. The custom was based on " the
conviction that the king must not be allowed to
become ill
or senile, lest with his diminishing vigour the cattle
should
sicken and fail to bear their increase, the crops should
rot in
the fields, and man, stricken with disease, should die In
ever-
increasing numbers/¹ It is said that Nyakang, like
Romulus,
disappeared in a great storm, which scattered all the
people
about him ; in their absence the king took a cloth, tied
it
tightly round his neck, and strangled himself.
According
to one account, that is the death which all his
successors on
the throne have died;² but while tradition appears to be
unanimous as to the custom of regicide, it varies as to
the
precise mode in which the kings were relieved of their
office
and of life. But still the people are convinced that
Nyakang
did not really die but only vanished mysteriously away
like
the wind. When a missionary asked the Shilluks as to
the
manner of Nyakang's death, they were filled with
amazement
at his ignorance and stoutly maintained that he never
died, for

were he to die all the Shilluks would die also.³ The graves of this deified king are shown in various parts of the country.

From time to time the spirit of Nyakang manifests itself The to his people in the form of an animal. Any creature of regal port or surpassing beauty may serve as his temporary supposed incarnation. Such among wild animals are lions, crocodiles, ^o ^e [^] ^{lfes} little yellow snakes that crawl about men's houses, the finest certain sorts of antelopes, flamingoes with their rose-pink and scarlet ^{mmas*}

ⁱ C. G. Seligmann, *The Cult of People*, p. xlii.
Nyakang, p. 221.

⁵⁴ D. Westermann, *The Shilluk* ³ D. Westermann, *Lc.*